

Chairperson Roberts and members of the committee, for the record my name is Krista Boutilier, I work as a school librarian at CR Anderson Middle School, and live here in Helena. My son Roman is two-and-a-half, very bright, hopelessly devoted to his older sister, and can easily be characterized as a typical rambunctious little boy. Despite all of his amiable qualities, Roman cannot say I love you, or tell you his favorite food or color, or if he's hungry or tired. If Roman were to become lost, he could not ask for help, tell you what's wrong, or even tell you his name. He suffers from verbal apraxia which is a motor speech disorder that causes great difficulty in planning and producing the precise, highly refined and specific series of movements of the tongue, lips, jaw and palate that are necessary for intelligible speech. Children with verbal apraxia will not speak without direct and explicit speech intervention.

Words cannot express how difficult it was for me to make the initial phone call to Family Outreach. As a parent, you really have to swallow your pride in order call a complete stranger and say that your child isn't developing "normally". Our Family Outreach coordinator, Carol Michaelis, has become a part of our family; my children always want Carol to stay for dinner. She has worked diligently with us to navigate the system of paperwork and multiple networks of help for Roman, provided beneficial information related to speech disorders and transition information into possible placement in special education preschool, instructional DVDs, she has helped us contact speech therapists, and procured a budget to assist in paying for Roman's speech services. Without the financial support of Family Outreach, we would not be able to afford the speech therapy sessions that Roman needs. Our health insurance does not cover speech services.

Family Outreach is an invaluable program designed to assist individuals struggling to help their own special needs children. Were it not for the involvement of my family, I would not have known its impact. I owe Roman's speech progress to Family Outreach and our coordinator Carol. Public programs like Family Outreach are generally first to reach the chopping block in difficult fiscal times. As you consider funding levels, I ask that you take to heart the words of the parents speaking before you today. I emphatically emphasize that Family Outreach is an essential service. Thank you for your consideration.